

VZCZCXRO1631
OO RUEHROV
DE RUEHEG #0488/01 0711517
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
O 111517Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8496
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RHMFISS/HQ USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEHEG/USOMC CAIRO EG IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 000488

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

NEA FOR FO
NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/PASCUAL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/11/2028
TAGS: [PARM](#) [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: GAZA BORDER UPDATE: TUNNELS, HUMANITARIAN ISSUES
AND SECURITY

REF: CAIRO 452 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: ECPO Counselor Catherine Hill-Herndon for reasons 1.4 (b)
) and (d).

11. (S) Summary. Egyptian security sources told us March 10 that on March 9 the Egyptians destroyed the openings of three smuggling tunnels on the Egyptian side of the Gaza border. The sources said that also on March 9, Egypt allowed 49 injured Palestinians to cross Rafah en route to hospitals in Ismailiya and Cairo. On March 9, Egypt transferred medicine, blankets and food into Gaza via Kerem Shalom, and Israel allowed a long-delayed shipment of goods to transit Kerem Shalom March 7. The sources said the situation along the border remains dangerous due to Israeli-Palestinian fighting near the border March 9 and 10, but they are hopeful that security on the border could improve due to Egyptian efforts to broker a cease-fire. The sources do not see imminent signs of a repeat Palestinian border breakout, but fear continued fighting could precipitate another crisis. The sources described current intelligence liaison with the Israelis as "useful," and consistent with the 2005 bilateral border agreement. End summary.

12. (S) Egyptian security sources told us March 10 that on March 9 the Egyptians destroyed the openings of three smuggling tunnels 700 meters from the border, and filled the tunnel openings with concrete. They said it is impossible for the Egyptians to destroy the entire underground "body" of a main cross-border tunnel because such an action would collapse the Philadelphi corridor and demolish homes on the Palestinian side of the border, causing civilian casualties. The sources noted that since Egypt opened Rafah March 2 for the passage of wounded Palestinians into Egypt for treatment, the Egyptians have seen an increase in tunneling, but a decrease in smuggling. They said that usually whenever Israel seals Gaza's borders to exert economic pressure, the Egyptians notice an increase in both tunneling and smuggling. They noted that smugglers are also able to use tunnels between Israel and Gaza, and that Israelis have sold weapons to Palestinians in Gaza.

13. (S) They said that on March 9, Egypt allowed 49 injured Palestinian civilians, accompanied by 23 relatives, to transit Rafah into Egypt for treatment at hospitals in Ismailiya and Cairo. Also on March 9, they told us, Egypt transferred 14 tons of medicine, 550 blankets, and 214 tons of food donated by Tunisia and Yemen, into Gaza through the Kerem Shalom crossing. The sources said that on March 7 Egypt succeeded in transferring humanitarian supplies, which had been in an Egyptian warehouse since August 2006, into Gaza through Kerem Shalom. They noted that Israel had

previously refused to allow these supplies, donated by Arab countries, into Gaza due to security concerns.

14. (S) When asked about LAWIO Major General Nagy's border visit planned for March 12, the sources said the general would not travel because the border situation was too dangerous. The security sources said that the IDF and Palestinians continued to engage in fighting close to the border March 9 and 10. Also, they noted that IDF tanks remained at the Kerem Shalom crossing. Our sources expected an improved security situation on the border during the second half of March due to ongoing Egyptian efforts to broker a ceasefire, and hoped that the senior general would be able to visit the border then.

15. (S) The sources cautioned that if Hamas and others continued their rocket attacks on Israel and the IDF responded forcefully, then border security could deteriorate and there could be a second breakout of Palestinians into Egypt. They confirmed that the GOE does not presently see any imminent danger of a breakout. They noted that only one rocket was fired March 9 from Gaza into Egypt, following a marked decrease in firing over the previous few days. They said that Egypt continues to build a concrete wall on the Rafah border, and is fortifying the wall with a metal, stone and wire barrier that the GOE had originally laid down on the border in January following the Palestinian breakout. They reconfirmed that the number of Egyptian Border Guard Forces remains at 750.

16. (S) Our sources described intelligence liaison efforts with the Israelis as "useful" and as currently consistent with the obligations under the September 2005 Border Agreement. According to the sources, sometimes when the

CAIRO 00000488 002 OF 002

Israelis pass intelligence on smuggling or tunneling, there can be a delay of a few days for the information to proceed through liaison channels, making it difficult for the Egyptians to take action. They pointed out that since the 2005 disengagement, the Israelis have been unable to take direct action against tunneling and smuggling on the Gaza side of the border.

RICCIARDONE